

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8147
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 4169

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PINR, EAIR, AF
SUBJECT: THE NEW AFGHAN CABINET: MINISTER OF FINANCE ABDUL KARIM
MISAQ

1. A HAZARA FROM WESTERN GHAZNI PROVINCE, ABDUL KARIM MISAQ IS A SLIGHT MAN IN HIS MID-TO-LATE THIRTIES WITH AN APPARENTLY AMBIVALENT FEELING -- PRIDE MIXED WITH DEFENSIVENESS -- ABOUT HIS HUMBLE ORIGINS. WHEN I ASKED WHERE HE WENT TO SCHOOL, HE REPLIED, "I DIDN'T, I WORKED AS A SERVANT IN THE HOUSE OF ARISTOCRATS AND WHEN THEIR CHILDREN WENT TO SCHOOL, I USED THE BOOKS WHICH THEY DIDN'T TAKE ALONG WITH THEM".
2. ALTHOUGH MODEST AND AMIABLE, THE NEW MINISTER'S EXPRESSION EASILY SHIFTS TO A STEELY HARDNESS, AND HE GIVES EVERY IMPRESSION OF BEING TOUGH AND DETERMINED. HE TOLD ME THAT HE WAS AN AUTHOR, WITH SOME TEN BOOKS AND STORIES TO HIS CREDIT, ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED." MISAQ, WHO SAYS HE SPEAKS RUSSIAN (LEARNED IN KABUL) BUT ONLY A LITTLE ENGLISH, USED AN INTERPRETER DURING MY CALL ON HIM MAY 21.
3. OUR MEETING, AT WHICH I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE ECON/COMM

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COUNSELOR, WAS FRIENDLY AND COURTEOUS, ALTHOUGH MISAQ IS OBVIOUSLY NOT LONG ON SOCIAL NICETIES. FOR EXAMPLE, I WAS NOT OFFERED TEA, CUSTOMARILY INESCAPABLE DURING CALLS ON AFGHAN OFFICIALS. HE DID, HOWEVER, TRY TO INTRODUCE SOME HUMOR INTO OUR CONVERSATION, AT ONE POINT REMARKING THAT AS A FINANCE MINISTER HIS JOB WAS TO TAKE IN AS MUCH MONEY AS HE COULD WHILE SPENDING AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE.

IT TOOK PERSISTENT COAXING ON MY PART TO ELICIT PERSONAL DETAILS FROM THE NEW MINISTER, BUT HE SHOWED NO RETICENCE IN DISCUSSING MORE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES.

4. MY PRINCIPAL ITEM OF BUSINESS WAS TO SOUND OUT MISAQ ON THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TOWARD THE MAJOR U.S. BUSINESS INTEREST HERE: PANAM'S INVESTMENT IN ARIANA. NOTING THAT PANAM'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE AFGHAN NATIONAL AIRLINE WAS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THE MUTUAL BENEFITS WHICH COULD FLOW FROM PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT, I ASKED MISAQ POINTBLANK WHAT THE GOVERNMENT THOUGHT ABOUT CONTINUING THE ARRANGEMENT. MISAQ REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO POLICY FOR DISCONTINUING PANAM'S PRESENT ROLE HERE. THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD, HE SAID, BE "LOOKING INTO THE ECONOMICS" OF THE AIRLINES, BUT THEY HAD NO WISH TO DAMAGE A USEFUL PROFIT-MAKING ORGANIZATION.

5. IT WAS EVIDENT FROM OUR CONVERSATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAS NOT FORMULATED A COHERENT PROGRAM. MISAQ REPEATED THE FAMILIAR FORMULA THAT CONDITIONS ARE "UNDER STUDY." HE ALSO REITERATED THE "WE WANT AID WITHOUT CONDITIONS". LINE WHICH THE TARAKI GOVERNMENT HAS PUSHED FROM THE BEGINNING. HE DID GET IN ONE MINOR BARB, HOWEVER; IN AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO THE USAID TRUST FUND, HE NOTED DRILY THAT THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN PREFERRED ECONOMIC

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ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS WHICH THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO "SUBSIDIZE."

6. COMMENT: WITH EVIDENTLY NO FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE, MISAQ MAY BE ONE MORE SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE. HOWEVER, HE HAS COME A LONG WAY -- FROM SERVANT TO MINISTER -- BY HIS OWN EFFORTS, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO SAY WHAT KIND OF RECORD SUCH A MAN WILL COMPILE.

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